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"Treating Our Farmers Fairly"

By Rep. Allen Boyd

Over the last several years, the United States has enjoyed an unprecedented period of prosperity and economic growth. Unfortunately, our nation's family farmers have not benefited from this abundance. In the wake of NAFTA and the implementation of a national farm policy destined for failure, America's farmers have suffered and many are on the verge of bankruptcy. Maintaining a self-sufficient agricultural industry is critical to our national security. So today, our government should be doing everything in its power to assist the weakened agricultural market. Instead, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is about to deliver another blow to America's family farmers.

Under the Food Quality Protection Act of 1996 (FQPA), EPA was directed to review the pesticides used by U.S. farmers to determine whether or not they are safe for human consumption, through food products or natural fibers. There is no question that to ensure the well-being of America's families, EPA should evaluate crop protection tools and restrict the use of products which threaten our health and safety.

Unfortunately, in a rush to meet an August deadline imposed by FQPA, EPA reviewers have been unable to consider new scientific data on pesticides, relying instead upon figures they have studied and utilized since the project began over two years ago. In addition, in their product evaluations, EPA has used extreme worst-case assumptions that do not come close to reflecting the average American's exposure to pesticides on agricultural products.

In an effort to ensure our farmers are treated fairly, I have joined several bipartisan colleagues in introducing H.R. 1592, the Regulatory Fairness and Openness Act. This legislation would require EPA, before it bans the use of any crop protection tool, to prove they have used sound scientific process and evaluated all available data.

If EPA issues its findings based on outdated figures and inappropriate assumptions, they could ban the use of many crop protection tools which America's family farmers depend on, and for which there may be no safe alternative. These restrictions would put U.S. farmers at an even greater competitive disadvantage with foreign imports which are not required to meet these strict regulatory requirements. As our growers struggle to battle pests and plant diseases without necessary tools, foreign farmers will flood our market with their products, which have been grown with chemicals we prohibit our farmers from using. This not only hurts American farmers; it hurts American consumers.

Certainly, we want to prohibit the use of dangerous chemicals in farming processes, but at the same time, we do not want to unnecessarily ban products which are critical to the success of America's farmers. In its April 9, 1999 editorial on EPA's pesticide review, the Tallahassee Democrat editorial board stated, "before taking steps that could exterminate exterminators, cripple our farmers and jack up our food prices, the EPA must be sure they've done the

homework." The Regulatory Fairness and Openness Act ensures that when EPA issues regulations on crop protection tools, these regulations will be based on sound science.

America's farmers can produce the highest quality food and fiber supply in the world, as long as they are provided a level playing field. Our farming families deserve no less.